DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 431 CE 001 592

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TITLE [The Continuing Education Unit: Operational Problems.]
PUB DATE 24 Nov 72
NOTE 12p.; A letter from Paul J. Grogan to Ms. Marlyne Hynds, C. W. Post College, Greenvale, Long Island, New York

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Education Programs; Adult Vocational Education; Letters (Correspondence); *Noncredit Courses; Post Secondary Education; Professional Continuing Education; *Recordkeeping
IDENTIFIERS CEU; *Continuing Education Unit

ABSTRACT

This letter responds to typical adverse comments concerning the utilization of the Continuing Education Unit (CEU). (1) Is the CEU credit for noncredit work? The CEU is not intended to be academic credit, rather recognition for the individual user's post-academic learning. (2) Isn't record keeping too time consuming and expensive? This need not be if records are kept where generated, purged every ten, fifteen, or twenty years, and the user instructed to maintain his own dossier. A national records center is not needed. (3) How can we be sure of the quality of continuing education? The broad spectrum of sponsorship dictates: "Let the utility rest in the eyes of the beholder." Let the user (marketplace) decide which is the appropriate offering and mission for the given sponsor in the context of his perceived need. (4) What does the CEU mean once accumulated? Each user group must establish, police, and maintain its own requirements for recognition. (Author/MW)

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November 24, 1972

ED 090431

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Dear Marlyne:

I am pleased to respond to your inquiry about operational problems concerning the c.e.u. that is presently being advocated by an ad hoc national task force. It has been my good fortune to serve as vice chairman of this group for the past four years. If I may say, I have been one of the principal spokesmen among its membership with respect to the underlying philosophy and broad purposes to be served by widespread adoption of the c.e.u. among sponsors and user groups, alike.

Despite my long experience and substantial speaking and writing addressed to the same subject, I cannot say at this time that there have been meaningful or in-depth operational experiences with the c.e.u. However, some 20-odd NUEA institutions did participage in a field exercise of packaging continuing education offerings in c.e.u. and maintaining individually accessible records of such fact. You can refer to NUEA for the results and continuing benefits, if any, from that exercise. In general, I believe, the institutional effort involved was some 85 percent acceptable. This percentage would have to increase, I believe, through further experience with the c.e.u. In particular, I can conceive of benefits accruing to the institution in terms of better determination of the use of faculty and facilities, comparative instructional costs between differing formats and disciplines, particularly in relationship to the undergraduate and graduate programs, etc. The prospect of future participation by the instructor in the recognition programs of various user groups should be another incentive to program in the c.e.u. mode.

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In quite a related context, I am enclosing a recent paper, University Relations with Industry. This presentation addresses itself to an organized or virtually systems' approach to continuing education. The arguments presented therein more or less undergird the principles of continuing education the task force has been advocating and end with a note about recognition in which the c.e.u. plays a role.

Another article, prepared by someone not associated with the task force, has just come to my attention. I am enclosing it for your files. The Advisory Board referred to therein is a misnomer for the task force. We are continuing in our ad hoc status and expect to persist in our efforts to promulgate the c.e.u. We do this although we have been unable to receive financial support from the foundations or O.E. for the effort. Neither do we have any official sanction other than the authorization stemming from the original National Planning Conference "to study and recommend" vis-a-vis the merits of a uniform system nationally for the measurement and recognition of participation in noncredit continuing education. We persist in our effort, of course, because we believe that we are dealing with "an idea whose time has come."

Let me review now some of the typical forms of adverse comments that have been received about the c.e.u. from time to time. The following rationale has evolved, along with our thinking in broad terms about the c.e.u., to answer the negative issues raised. I might add that most of the negative comments are in the form of ridicule that stems from the "conventional wisdom" in this regard and a considerable lack of understanding of what the c.e.u. proposes to do and how little its use bears upon or relates to formal courses for formal credit and with a degree in mind as the ultimate objective.

Credit for Noncredit Work

Many academics voice this concern upon their first exposure to "recognition for participation in noncredit continuing education." I suggest, by way of response, that continuing education -- as an educational activity with specific audiences, levels, contents, formats and purposes -- exists for reasons other than diploma or degree credit. These latter avenues are served traditionally and,

let us say, well enough by the conventional academic programs of existing educational institutions over the spectrum of need ranging from the high school diploma to the doctoral degree.

However, no matter how well these programs are conducted and how widespread their use becomes, there always remains a great need for a large, varied, changing and growing body of continuing education addressed to such purposes as: a) refresher, b) updating, c) broadening, d) advancing state of the art, e) recognizing technological change, f) combatting technological obsolescence, g) serving vocational needs, h) satisfying avocational interests, k) professional development, l) "the whole-man" concept, etc.

In support of this claim, I dare say that continuing education has shown more sustained growth in this country since the post-WW II period than any other branch of education. At least that claim can be documented here at The University of Wisconsin.

Any responsible organization engaging in continuing education should recognize several facets of its operation that have been largely absent heretofore:

1. If the continuing education activity is worthy of institutional sponsorship and the lending the use of its name, faculty and facilities, then it is worthy of the maintenance of some measurable, recognizable and transferable form of record that attests to that commitment and involvement. The substance of this record, which by its very purpose and nature is predominantly applicable to the world of change and the world of work, is c.e.u., not academic credit. There should be no confusion and no quarrel between the two distinct sets of educational activity. One is diploma and degree oriented, the other is career and avocationally oriented.

2. The clientele that participates in continuing education should have the right and the incentive to make progress through a planned and additive sequence of learning experiences that eventually lead to demonstrable proficiency in a new area or level of human endeavor. This program certainly should be available through a multiplicity of sponsorships and should be capable of easy restructuring from time to tome whether due to changes taking place in the real world or due to new interests and objectives on the part of the individual learner.

The above arguments are but two sides of the same coin. In short, the sponsor should legitimatize his offerings in continuing education. Following the same rationale, and given the opportunity, the individual user should have the opportunity to introduce sufficient order and purpose into his postacademic learning experiences to meet either the demands of his career or the newfound interests in his cultural and avocational life due to the world of change in which all of us are immersed.

The purposes behind the recognition conferred with continuing education have nothing to do with the credit track. The purpose is simply to offer the great potential body of using public the right to achieve certain status or satisfactions through continuing education in the forms of: a) meeting the initial qualifications for hiring, b) earning promotion, c) qualifying for merit increases, d) taking part in a general rehabilitation of ones educational qualifications, e) making a job change, f) making a career change, g) receiving a "second chance" in life for the attainment and maintenance of educational qualifications, h) improving upon leadership qualifications, i) attaining professional stature, j) satisfying licensure requirements, k) enjoying personal growth, l) qualifying for organizational membership, m) meriting advance in grade of membership, n) peer recognition, o) community recognition, etc.

The Record Keeping Will Be too Time-consuming and Expensive

Instructional records can become a burden if we permit them to become so, but the matter should not be allowed to become that complex. First off, under the philosophy I advocate, recognition is conferred upon the individual by some "user group" that can or does have an influence upon his stature and relative progress among that group. Thus, the user groups become: a) actual or potential employers, through their personnel departments; b) membership organizations, for example, trade, technical and professional societies, whether at local, state or national levels; c) licensing agencies; d) those who administer promotional policies; e) community organizations etc.

It is not the role of the sponsor of continuing education, as one among many and varied sponsors who contribute to the individual

progress toward meeting user-oriented goals, to be involved in the reward or recognition that the individual receives. This clear-cut demarcation relieves the typical sponsor of virtually all aspects of record keeping other than a minimal statement of facts concerning who, what, when, where, why and how. In practice, the record can scarcely help but be generated by the sponsoring organization. The individual should receive some certification of this record from the sponsor at the time it is earned.

In the larger sense, this record is then actually conferred upon the beneficiary and the issue is largely closed from the sponsor's point of view. However, the sponsor does have an inherent obligation to make that record a part of the permanent institutional files capable of later recovery to attest to the corresponding record attested to in the individuals' dossier.

Where use is to be made of it, the individual presents his personally accumulated record for review by the user group through whom he seeks recognition. In the general case, the user group will have been a virtual co-sponsor of the educational opportunity inasmuch as it is the user's concept of content, objective and planned program of learning that is most often served through the design of continuing education opportunities. These program criteria are the equivalent of academic curriculum requirements. And the user group's endorsement of the activity by encouraging its clientele to participate in the learning experience serves the purposes of accreditation. Thus a potentially large area of sponsor concern about the staffing, facilities, methodologies, etc., of other sponsors are left for the user groups to resolve. The user group is the one being served by all such effort. It is really his responsibility to decide who is to participate and how the various offerings dovetail in meeting his need.

Other records are generated by the institution in the normal conduct of its continuing education program but these are simply allowed to exist as static files. Personally, I doubt if as much as three percent of the institutional vis-a-vis its continuing education program file will ever be the subject of inquiry for any purposes whatsoever.

Moreover, the institution can protect itself by saying (indeed, as we might all say nationally) that there is an element of currency about all continuing education. Therefore, it could become institutional policy that no continuing education experience will be substantiated after a period of ten years , fifteen at most.

In this next respect, I may stand pretty much alone among the task force members, but I do not see the need for a national records center. If I learned anything my two years in Washington, I learned that "information expands more rapidly than its use." In fact, this is Grogan's Law that applies insofar as the information explosion and the problem of its national dissemination are concerned. As I see it, the record-keeping aspect concerning c.e.u. does not become complex unless we make it so.

By way of summary:

1. Keep the record where it is generated, but have a facility for attesting to its authenticity whenever occasional inquiry is directed to the sponsor of the continuing education experience.

2. Indeed, there can be a deliberate policy on the part of the sponsor for purging the system of all such records after the passage of, say, ten, 15 or 20 years.

3. Give the recipient a credible facsimile of his attainment as recorded in the sponsor's long-term files. Instruct him in the importance of compiling and maintaining his own dossier of: a) formal educational background, b) pertinent work experiences to date, c) forms of recognition conferred upon him, d) singular accomplishments and attainments both within career field and in the service of society at large, e) organizational memberships, f) offices positions held within membership organizations, g) special committees, services and contributions and, lastly, h) continuing education. This listing of the spectrum of human development activities puts continuing education in its proper perspective. This should be but one facet of the totality of the human potential as expressed in terms of individual contributions made and the pattern of career development.

4. Work with user groups in developing meaningful programs of individual progress and achievement. Immediately you will see that meeting this goal requires many inputs besides continuing

education. Therefore, the curriculum is his, not yours. You are but a part of it, but neither responsible for its total design nor custodian of individual progress within or the likely consequences of such a determined pursuit. Accreditation, meaning acceptance for the purpose intended, is his obligation, not yours. This is fortunate, indeed, for now you do not have to evaluate continuing education as purveyed by other sponsors. You do not have to integrate the significance of in-service training, job skills, work experiences, participation in society meetings and activities, etc. All of these latter items may be important in the context of individual development for specific recognition purposes, but it is not within the scope of your interests, capabilities or responsibilities to evaluate them and determine what their accumulation means.

5. Let the recognition -- or the tangible form of reward, which is often indistinguishable from the recognition conferred by virtue of continuing education -- be within the province of the user group. After all, the individual is most often in pursuit of a specific career goal, e.g., hiring, promotion, merit increase, grade of membership, peer group acceptance, licensure etc. There are no institutional rewards that can serve these purposes.

6. Concentrate upon what you do best. That is organize and conduct quality programs of continuing education that serve the needs of the clientele groups you have either identified or who have made their needs known to you.

How Can We Be Sure of the Quality of Continuing Education?

Many of the righteous and the skeptical ask how we are to accredit continuing education. This has been answered, in part, above. But follow me.

1. The sources of sponsorship in continuing education number in the tens of thousands. Included are: a) universities, b) colleges, c) the respective extension arms of both, above, d) community colleges, e) technical-vocational schools, f) special institutes, g) research institutes, h) proprietary schools, i) the newly emerging knowledge industry, j) publishers, k) educational consultants l) in-plant programs, m) society programs,

n) church-related programs, o) community-related programs, p) military training, q) reserve training, r) executive seminars, s) retreats, t) field trips, u) demonstrations, v) travel-study, w) training films, x) public lectures, y) educational television, z) foundations and other not-for profit institutes, etc. No one is capable of, is interested in or has the breadth of compassion and understanding to evaluate programs across this broad spectrum of sponsorhsip. Hence the conclusion, "let the utility (purpose of the particular continuing education program) rest in the eyes of the beholder." "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God, free at last!" The purpose of each potential sponsor becomes simply that of doing the best job he is capable of doing within the context of the identified need, the group being served and his own stature among the hierarchy of potential sponsors. Thus, a university offering, an in-plant program and a technical society meeting all serve different facets of the individual's development in the fulfillment of specific user purposes through the broad meaning of continuing education.

2. Neither do I see the need for a "pecking order" wherein major educational institutions "accredit" one another's program; wherein proprietary schools in home study operations "give their stamp of approval" to one another's programs, etc. Let the user decide, with appropriate assistance, what his educational program should be and where in the spectrum of a) to z), above, he can call upon the appropriate sources of sponsorship. To be sure, these decisions should be made carefully and with inputs: a) from practitioners in field, for scope and objectives; b) from educators, for content and methodolgy; c) from others, e.g., industrial psychologists or training directors, for the fulfillment of specific training objectives, etc. In the light of these considerations, "accreditation" among a clique of institutions of higher education becomes a meaningless exercise. Let each sponsor, on the other hand, attain the highest possible standard within the context of what he has set out to accomplish. Often, of course, that standard will be dictated by his "audience, subject and purpose" and not by the institutional reputation for general excellence in the field. "Industrial chemistry," for example, can be taught at three levels:

a) to tanners and papermakers, b) to laboratory technicans and persons monitoring stream pollution, and c) to research scientists and administrators. Each course is taught by the same institution. The instructional staffs may be the same or different. But "the audience, content and purpose" are clearly different in each instance. At the same time, a single, blanket institutional accreditation should not be expected to serve all three purposes. In short, let the user (the marketplace) decide which is the appropriate offering and mission for the given sponsor in the context of his perceived need. Thus, tanners and papermakers may attend an evening class at the local vocational school. A manufacturer of proprietary equipment or compounds may instruct technicians in the use of their products for routine test and monitoring purposes. A learned society or a university may be most likely to offer programs of interest and utility to research-minded persons.

What Do Continuing Education Units Mean Once They are Accumulated?

Comparison is often made between c.e.u. and the "brownie points" associated with Girl Scout activity. It is also suggested that teacher requirements for salary increases and promotion that are predicated upon post-baccalaureate education and in-service training have degenerated to a perfunctory compliance for which rewards are expedted automatically. These are damning indictments for which I have no guaranteed panacea. Certainly the enthusiasm of the individual learners in the latter example has not been helped by the fact that the standards have often been imposed upon them by administrative fiat instead of coming forth from the membership at large as a genuine desire to be served through continuing education.

Permit me to suggest, however, that no recognition program can be better than the internal standards of excellence to which it aspires. Each user group should be encouraged to recognize excellence among its own clientele in terms of standards that are kept consistent with the "track record" and public esteem in which the societal membership at large is either held or to which it aspires.

In this light, doctors and roofers have two different sets of standards concerning their respective continuing education experiences. Compare the respective differences in: a) scope, b) level, c) intensity, d) demonstrable proficiency, e) currency,

f) peer judgments, g) accomplishments in related facets of their calling, etc. The public recognition (esteem, accord, permissible latitude and level of individual responsibility, etc.) conferred upon individuals by virtue of their continuing education will be in proportion to the overall degree of difficulty of their accomplishment and the general standards of excellence demanded of the individual in the pursuit of recognition.

It is up to each user group to establish, police and maintain its own requirements for recognition. The relative standing of the group within the hierarchy of professions, callings, vocations, avocations, peer groups, etc., in this country will be set eventually by the standards maintained within their respective groupings and applied for recognition purposes through the mechanism of continuing education.

Compare this opportunity with the way such affairs are conducted today with respect to formal education as virtually the only existing measure of individual competence and proficiency in a chosen line of endeavor. Academics assume, of course, that level of degree and the identity of the institution, department and major professor of record are the controlling factors in appraising the excellence of individuals or teams of individuals joined in common endeavor. The actual quality and content of formal education is seldom questioned beyond the guiding parameters of who, what, where and when, as alluded to above.

The currency of degrees are never questioned. Yet the rapid rate of sociological and technological change make all established education open to some recounting, no matter how prestigious it may be. How do we cope properly with the rapid and sweeping change affecting educational content unless we concern ourselves with meaningful programs of continuing education? Witness such revolutionary developments as: a) transistors, b) micro-miniaturization, c) computers, d) the new economics, e) statistical insights and inferences, f) microbiology, g) ecology h) environmental quality, i) biomedical engineering, j) space, astronomy and cosmology, k) the "new" China and Russia, l) liberation causes in the examples of youth, blacks, minorities, new consumerism, the incarcerated etc., m) changing life styles in the examples of attitudes toward

drugs, formal religions, the work ethic, abortion, marriage, family, etc. These are contemporary facts of life that must be dealt with "in the now" through continuing education. They cannot be deferred as issues until faculty committees find room for such subjects in the crowded curricula of present-day degree programs.

We can no longer presume that one's education is adequate or complete at any particular time and place in life. The question comes down, I suppose, to whose responsibility is continuing education? Bear in mind, before answering this question in favor of the traditional educational establishment, that there are at least 35,000 different careers that people follow in America. Does any large, comprehensive system like The State University of New York or The University of Wisconsin feel adequate to dispense current knowledge in all of these fields?

Secondly, the sources of new knowledge are more likely to be in the field of practice than in the field of teaching. There is a typical ten-year lag between the creation of useful new knowledge and its first appearance in educational curricula. Ten more years may follow before the student who benefits from such recently updated instruction becomes a responsible practitioner in the field. Thus, 15 or 20 years may lapse between the first reduction of an idea to successful practice and the first generation of students entering the field of practice through academia. Moreover, those students may well find that their methods are already obsolete when they first begin to apply them in the field.

The process I have detailed above is current, but, what is more, it is also continuous. There is no such thing as becoming "up to date." Change wells up constantly, in fact, ever more rapidly all around us. This change occurs most likely and most rapidly among practitioners in the field. Thus the case is always present for continuing education in the form of the practicum, the internship, the in-service opportunity, the demonstration, the field experience, the seminar, the symposium, the exchange of information that serves to keep practitioners of the particular specialty abreast of the change that affects their line of endeavor. None of these formats lend themselves particularly well to credits. But, c.e.u., each measured in terms of ten hours' equivalent immersion in the learning situation may be applied to all. Margins of error

in the range of 10 to 20 percent are unimportant. What is important is that the individual applied himself through the most appropriate format and that some record of his participation has been kept. But that record is useful to the group through whom he seeks recognition, and to himself; it has little or no importance to the sponsor of record.

I hope you have stayed with me this far, Marlyne. There are other philosophical aspects of the c.e.u. that have occurred to me from time to time, but I hope the argument and exposure presented above will serve your immediate purposes in taking the subject under advisement.

Please keep me apprised of developments within your institution. I would be most happy to share these thoughts in more depth with your colleagues in any suitable forum that may materialize over the next several months.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Grogan

Paul J, Grogan
Professor of Engineering

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